

Message Text

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PAGE 01 VIENTI 00272 020852Z
ACTION SNM-05

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R 010500Z MAR 78
FM AMEMBASSY VIENTIANE
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 9061
AMEMBASSY BANGKOK
USMISSION GENEVA
AMCONSUL HONG KONG
AMEMBASSY STOCKHOLM
DEA WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L VIENTIANE 0272

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: SNAR LA SW
SUBJECT: SWEDISH NARCOTICS OFFICIAL CONVERSATION WITH EMBOFF

REF: BANGKOK 6231 NOTAL

1. EMBOFF DISCUSSED NARCOTICS MATTERS IN GENERAL FEBRUARY 28 WITH BO LEWIN, SWEDISH EMBASSY (BANGKOK) LEGAL ATTACHE. DURING THE DISCUSSION, EMBOFF NOTED U.S. CONCERN THAT SOUTHEAST ASIA MIGHT RE-EMERGE AS A SIGNIFICANT SOURCE OF ILLICIT HEROIN ENTERING THE U.S. EMBOFF NOTED THAT U.S. DIPLOMATS IN THE LPDR FACED VERY STRICT RESTRICTIONS ON TRAVEL, AND THAT AS A RESULT THE EMBASSY'S NARCOTICS REPORTING WAS LIMITED PRIMARILY TO SECOND HAND INFORMATION DERIVED FROM TRAVELING EXPERTS AND TECHNICIANS.

2. LEWIN ASKED WHAT EMBOFF KNEW ABOUT THE BAN DONE SITE. EMBOFF PRODUCED A MAP OF THE AREA WHICH SHOWED DETAILED CONTOUR ELEVATIONS AND EXISTING SETTLEMENT PATTERNS. LEWIN COMMENTED THAT SUCH TERRAIN COULD NOT
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SUPPORT OPIUM PRODUCTION.

3. LEWIN SAID THAT SWEDISH FORESTRY EXPERTS HAD TOLD HIM DURING HIS CURRENT VISIT THAT LPLA OFFICERS OFTEN PURCHASED OPIUM FROM LOCAL HILL TRIBESMEN IN RURAL AREAS. LEWIN SAID THAT WHEN HE HAD MENTIONED THERE REPORTS TO UNFDAC'S VIENTIANE REPRESENTATIVE ALEXANDRE

ARNAUD, ARNAUD HAD SAID THAT SUCH REPORTS COULD NOT POSSIBLY BE TRUE. LEWIN THEN ASKED EMBOFF IF THE U.S. EMBASSY HAD ANY HARD INFORMATION TO CONFIRM LPDR INVOLVEMENT IN ILLICIT NARCOTICS PRODUCTION OR TRAFFICKING. EMBOFF EXPLAINED THAT AS A COLLECTOR OF BASICALLY SECOND HAND INFORMATION, ANYTHING THE U.S. EMBASSY IN VIENTIANE MIGHT SAY ON THE TOPIC COULD BE MISLEADING AND THAT SUCH CONCLUSIONS COULD BEST BE DRAWN IN WASHINGTON.

4. EMBOFF NOTED THAT FOR A POOR COUNTRY SUCH AS LAOS, NARCOTICS MIGHT BE A TEMPTING SOURCE OF REVENUE. LEWIN SAID THAT THIS WAS OBVIOUS AND THAT HE HAD MADE THE SAME POINT TO ARNAUD, BUT THAT ARNAUD HAD REASONED THAT LAOS DIDN'T NEED THE MONEY. HE MENTIONED AT THIS POINT THAT ARNAUD HAD CLAIMED THAT LAO OPIUM PRODUCTION ANNUALLY WAS AROUND 500 TONS. LEWIN SAID THAT HE FOUND THIS FIGURE ABSURD AND THAT HE FELT THAT THE DEA FIGURE OBTAINED IN BANGKOK WAS REALISTIC.

5. LEWIN SAID THAT ARNAUD ALSO HAD EXPLAINED THAT THE PRINCIPAL DIFFICULTY FACING LAO AUTHORITIES IN THEIR ATTEMPTS TO FIND A SITE FOR THE UNFDAC CROP SUBSTITUTION PROJECT WAS THE GENERAL INSECURITY OF HIGHLAND AREAS. EMBOFF COMMENTED THAT NOT ALL HIGHLAND TERRITORY WAS INSECURE AND THAT WHILE LPDR CONTROL OF HIGH-

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LAND AREAS WAS SPOTTY, IT SEEMED CLEAR THAT THERE WERE MOUNTAINOUS SECTORS WITH OPIUM PRODUCTION POTENTIAL, PARTICULARLY IN THE FORMER PL ZONE, WHICH THE LPDR HAD ALWAYS CONTROLLED.

6. LEWIN ASKED WHAT THE EMBASSY KNEW OF HEROIN PRODUCTION IN VIENTIANE, MENTIONING THAT HE HAD HEARD REPORTS OF SUCH PRODUCTION WHILE IN BANGKOK. EMBOFF EXPLAINED THAT EMBASSY VIENTIANE WAS NOT THE SOURCE OF SUCH REPORTS AND WAS NOT IN A POSITION TO COMMENT ON THEM. EMBOFF NOTED THAT GIVEN THE TIGHT CONTROL WHICH THE GOVERNMENT EXERCISED OVER THE CITY, IF THERE WERE ANY HEROIN PRODUCTION IN VIENTIANE, IT SEEMED UNLIKELY THAT LAO AUTHORITIES WOULD BE UNAWARE OF ITS EXISTENCE.

7. MOST OF THE REST OF THE CONVERSATION DEALT WITH PROGRESS OF CROP SUBSTITUTION PROJECTS IN THAILAND, PROSPECTS FOR THE OPIUM CROP IN THE GOLDEN TRIANGLE THIS YEAR, SWEDISH EVALUATION OF THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THAI ANTI-NARCOTICS EFFORTS, AND THE POSSIBLE DEVELOPMENT OF A RANGOON-PENANG TRAFFICKING ROUTE. AT THE

CONCLUSION OF THE CONVERSATION EMBOFF REITERATED THAT AS A GATHERED RATHER THAN A COLLATOR OR ANALYSER OF NARCOTICS INTELLIGENCE, EMBASSY VIENTIANE SIMPLY COULD NOT PROVIDE AS SOUND A PERSPECTIVE ON THE NARCOTICS PROBLEM IN LAOS AS THAT WHICH MIGHT BE PROVIDED BY U.S. OFFICIALS ELSEWHERE.

8. IN A SUBSEQUENT CONVERSATION WITH SWEDISH CHARGE D'AFFAIRES SVEN BACKLUND DURING THE EVENING OF FEBRUARY 28, EMBOFF NOTED THAT EMBASSY VIENTIANE AND EMBASSY BANGKOK SHARED IDENTICAL VIEWS ON NARCOTICS MATTERS IN LAOS.

9. COMMENT: INASMUCH AS EMBOFF WAS DEALING WITH A CONFIDENTIAL

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COMPETENT REPRESENTATIVE OF A FRIENDLY GOVERNMENT WITH WHICH THE U.S. SHARES COMMON OBJECTIVES IN THE NARCOTICS AREA, EMBOFF LESS THAN CANDID RESPONSES TO LEWIN'S QUESTIONS PRODUCED AN AWKWARD SITUATION (BANGKOK 6231).
ROBERTS

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NNN

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